

## Istook says he did part for funding

**By Chris Casteel, Washington Bureau**

WASHINGTON — Rep. Ernest Istook plans to meet with state road builders today to tout the money he has secured for highway construction.

Contractors across the nation have been lobbying for an increase in federal highway spending over the next few years. The battle over long-term funding — and whether a gas tax hike will be part of it — still must be fought.

The highway bill was delayed this year because an agreement could not be reached on a source of new money.

Istook, R-Warr Acres, is not on the committees that will write the longterm bill. But he will claim to two groups of contractors that he has done his part for the short term.

Now chairman of the House subcommittee that oversees all transportation spending, Istook has increased the amount Oklahoma gets through the federal formula used to allocate road dollars; he also added millions for specific projects, including the Interstate 40 Crosstown Expressway in Oklahoma City which got \$13.2 million.

Oklahoma will likely receive more for highway construction than motorists paid in federal fuel taxes. Oklahoma is typically a "donor" state, paying more than it gets back.

Micah Swafford, Istook's press secretary, said the state averaged a 93-cent return for each dollar paid in fuel taxes over the last five years.

The final figures for this year's fuel tax receipts have not been compiled, but over the last five years the state sent an average of \$473.4 million a year to the federal government.

Istook said the state will receive at least \$479 million this year. That would be a boost of about \$50 million over last year, counting the formula money and special project money.

That, according to figures compiled by federal officials, would rank the state first in the nation in highway funds per capita when projects called "new starts" are not included; when those projects are included, the state would rank eighth.

The 2004 federal fiscal year began Oct. 1. The House has cleared its highway bill, but the Senate just passed its version Thursday. A final version will have to be written by House and Senate negotiators, and Istook said he hopes to increase the state's money and the portion going to the Crosstown Expressway project.